

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Date of entry 02/09/2023

I [REDACTED] Gaskins, identification not provided, telephone [REDACTED], was interviewed at the Barnes and Noble bookstore in Hampton, Virginia. After being advised of the identity of the interviewing agent and the nature of the interview, Gaskins provided the following information:

In the summer of 2018, Gaskins was looking for a place to live, and saw a large For Rent sign at [REDACTED] 41<sup>st</sup> Street in Newport News. The phone number on the sign turned out to be David Merryman's business phone number, however when Gaskins called the number a woman named Sarah Murphy answered, and asked Gaskins to meet at Merryman's place of business on Ranhorne Court in Hampton. Gaskins had to pay a \$65 application fee, and she (Gaskins) completed an application. Murphy told Gaskins that 1129 41<sup>st</sup> Street was not ready for Gaskins to live in, but that Murphy would "remove the locks" and Gaskins could do a walk-through on her own. Gaskins took a friend to do the walk through. The house was filthy, had no stove, no door on the refrigerator. There were rat droppings on the floors and water damage. The water heater in the bathroom leaked.

After her walk through, Gaskins started receiving calls from Merryman, who told her the property would be ready for her in a "couple weeks." Gaskins did not sign a lease before moving in, as Merryman told her it would not be necessary. The woman who lived across the street, named Tracy (phonetic) last name unknown (LNU) got in an argument in the middle of the street with Merryman.

Merryman did not fix anything before Gaskins moved in, but told Gaskins that whatever she fixed, she could take off her rent payment. She kept and sent copies of her receipts for the work she did. It was hot when she moved in, and Gaskins' daughter called her to tell her it was hot in the house. Gaskins told her daughter to turn on the air conditioning. When Gaskins got home, the air conditioning did not appear to be working. Gaskins called her uncle, Jonathan Beatty, who came over to the house and told Gaskins that the main air conditioning unit had been removed. Gaskins had seen the air conditioning unit at the house when she did her walk through. Tracy LNU told Gaskins that Merryman's business vehicles had been at the house, and no

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other vehicles. Tracy LNU thought the workers were replacing the air conditioner.

Merryman accused Gaskins of stealing the air conditioner, and began threatening her to make payments she did not owe. Merryman repeatedly referred to Gaskins as a "nigger," and made racist statements like "Donald Trump is going to make you niggers get a job." Gaskins worked at the shipyards, and pointed out to Merryman that her employer was listed on her application.

Gaskins' daughter was 14 years old at the time, and called Gaskins at work. Gaskins' daughter was terrified, and told Gaskins "someone's beating on the windows." Gaskins asked her cousin, Dante Gary (phonetic) to go to the house. Gary is a big man. Gary went to the house and saw Merryman. Merryman told Gary that if Gaskins did not pay the rent, Merryman would change the locks on the doors.

Merryman broke windows in the house and ripped up the porch in an effort to intimidate Gaskins. Sometimes Merryman would park in front of the house for hours. Merryman always carried his gun while he was doing this. Merryman kept his pistol in a belt clip holster, and if Merryman was coming into the house, he would take the pistol out of his belt and leave it in the truck. The gun was a silver on black semi-automatic. Merryman would send workers to the house when Gaskins' daughters were home alone. Gaskins' older daughter is very tall, and the girl felt silly when Gaskins arranged babysitting for her, but Gaskins believed that Merryman posed a serious threat to her kids' well-being.

Merryman used a "T key" to turn the water off at the street. Gaskins called the police. Merryman left when the police arrived, and Gaskins showed the officers the racist text messages Merryman sent her. Gaskins also called the water company. They told her it was a violation for Merryman to turn the water off. Gaskins assumes the water company contacted Merryman. Merryman got angry and sent Gaskins a text message threatening to "turn you and your Black ass kids into potting soil."

Merryman's threat to harm Gaskins and her kids frightened Gaskins to the point that she arranged with her employer to change from day shift to evening shifts (to be with the kids during the day), and she also immediately asked the courts for a protective order, which the courts issued. Gaskins later went to get the protection order renewed. Merryman either did not show up for the court hearing, or walked out. The judge seemed to be very familiar with Merryman, and renewed the protection order without any questions.

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When Gaskins was moving out, Merryman sent two employees - both Black men - to do a "walk through." Gaskins asked them what they were supposed to do, they both responded they had no idea. Gaskins showed them some of the racist text messages Merryman sent her, and asked them how they could work for him. They apologized and left the house.

Merryman tried to spit on Gaskins. The police asked her whether or not he hit her with his spit, and when she responded that he had not, they told her there was nothing they could do about it if he had not hit her. Gaskins was incredibly frustrated. It was clear based on her experience that "everyone" - the police, the courts, the housing inspectors - know that Merryman is a "terrorist," but nobody seems to care or wants to do anything about him. Gaskins had legal representation through the Legal Aid office, and agreed to allow Legal Aid to share her information with the reporting agent. Merryman left a threatening message with Melissa, Gaskins' Legal Aid attorney.

Merryman is so bad that there is a Facebook group of his former tenant victims. Gaskins showed the reporting agent some contacts from her phone, including Stepphond Freeman, a Black male. She advised that Freeman "got in a fight" with Merryman. She also knows a woman named Tanisha Pryor from the Facebook group. Gaskins used to work with a woman named Travena Jones, who was also one of Merryman's tenants. A man named Chris Taylor had similar experiences with Merryman. Merryman tried to "hit Taylor with a shovel." Gaskins agreed to reach out to these people and have them contact the reporting agent.

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Date of entry 03/13/2023

By email dated 01/18/23, the writer received from [REDACTED] Director, Legal Aid of Southern Virginia, the attached file materials from [REDACTED] client, [REDACTED] Gaskins. The file materials include a text message exchange between Gaskins and captioned subject David Merryman, who was Gaskins' landlord at the time of the exchange. The exchange documents that Gaskins sent a number of messages to Merryman asking when certain repairs/cleaning will be done, including the statement: "still no word about a unit for heat or ac it's cold we can wrap up for heat tho we shouldn't have to." Merryman's responses, which may be interpreted to acknowledge his agreement to take things off the rent that Gaskins paid for herself, include the following statements:

- "I have 23 people still owe me rent money from September, and Guess what!!! They are all black!!!

- "You don't [sic] any white people sitting down for the national anthem. Think about it"

- Even Colin (the QB for San Fran) he's mixed, like you And he's confused, doesn't know which color he stands for"

- "Then all the black porch monkey name calling started"

- "Black lives matter."

- "You know our president Donald Trump is going to make you black people get a job

- "Pay your Fucking rent or get the fuck out of the house"

- "You owe 583.40 now stop fucking around and pay me"

- "I know you're black and you probably don't understand basic directions but Sarah sent you the piece of paper earlier did you not read it"

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